

[Dunnell #11]

Mass. 1938-9

STATE Massachusetts

NAME OF WORKER Robert Wilder

ADDRESS Northfield, Massachusetts

DATE June 15, 1939

SUBJECT Living Lore

NAME OF INFORMANT G. O. Dunnell

ADDRESS Northfield, Massachusetts

Name Robert Wilder

Title The Study of Living Lore

Paper 11

Assignment Northfield

Topic G. O. Dunnell, Hay, Grain and Feed Man

It was a warm June day with soft white clouds floating lazily in the sky and a gentle breeze ruffling the maples. Mr. Dunnell was lounging at ease in front of his hay, grain and feed shack when I dropped by to make him a present of some maple syrup.

"Thanks," was his booming acceptance, "I always like maple syrup. This looks like the real thing too by G-d! Guess I'll keep this for myself. Everytime I get any good stuff like this, the whole durn family wants to sample it and their samples ain't so small either. Say, did I ever tell you about the feller that lived up beyant Charlemont village — lived in the big house you can see across the river on the road that goes to West Hawley — that put maple syrup on everything he et. Used to use thirty gallons a year just for himself alone. Never seemed to hurt him none, either. He lived to be a good age. And only died due to an accident he had. And lots of people will tell yer that you shouldn't eat too much sweet stuff. 'Course, I like maple syrup on bread; and on beans. But I never tried it on my pertaters, or on my meat, by G-d! But that's what this feller done. Everything he et just swimming in maple syrup. He was a good-natured, jolly sort of feller, too. I don't know as it was the effects of eating so much maple syrup, or not. But he was always cheerful and jolly. And when I was up that way I always managed to get to see him. He died about six months ago.

"Last time I see him, I was up that way with my boys. I happened to think that we could use a couple of quarts of maple syrup ourselves.

2

And I knew he would have it — Gosh! I can't think of his name. And I know it as well as I do my own — Well, we drove over and rapped. He come to the door with his face half shaved. And he acted real pleased to see us. He had us come in and set down while he finished shaving. And I guess it was the first time the boys had ever seen a feller shave himself with an old fashioned razor. They didn't know anybody ever had 'em outside of barber shops.

"I told him what we wanted. And he said he guessed he could spare a couple of quarts. That he'd been counting the jugs the other day, and he found he had seventeen gallons left. That, if he went cautious, that would be enough to last him until sugarin' time come again.

Library of Congress

"He told us a story that made me laugh. Tain't much of a story. But 'twas comical the way he told it.

"Seems he claimed there warn't no one that could run a mowin' machine like him. An' I guess they couldn't. Not outside of a circus, to let him tell it. He found fault with the way his hired man was running the machine — didn't dast to mow along the side of a steep hill. Went up and down the hill, 'stead of 'round and 'round as he thought it ought ter be done. Well, he got on the machine to show how to do it and started off along the side of the hill. He got about half across when the upper wheel hit a rock that lifted it up, and the machine tipped over. The long part, where the blades are, caught him in the seat of the pants, and threw him down the hill right in the way of the machine. Somehow the blades kept goin' and sheared him here and there, like as if 3 he was a sheep. And, anyway, he had to go to the hospital.

"He didn't like it in the hospital. Mainly, because they didn't have no maple syrup. But they understood how it was, and let him send for some of his own. And then he didn't like it settin' around all day with just his pajamas and bath robe and slippers. It was good hay weather. And he wanted to get back and finish haying. He warn't by no means sure that the hired man would finish his haying scientific.

"One day he heard a mowing machine at some distance from the hospital. That was too much for him. If they was any mowing to be done, he had to be around to see that they done it right. He watched his chance. And he managed to get out of that hospital just as he was in that bathrobe and no hat and on up the street looking after that mowing machine. People looked at him kinder funny. But nobody stopped him. He found out, though, that he was kinder weak, which surprised him. They'd told him that he'd lost considerable blood when the machine give him a shearing but it hadn't meant anything to him, settin' around the hospital, and he couldn't understand why they wouldn't let him go home. But walking up the street in the hot sun, he begun to surmise. "

Library of Congress

He kept on, though. And he found the hayfield. It was part of a big farm that fronted on the street. And I guess the owner was holding on to part of it for building lots. They was a sidewalk. But they warn't no fence. And the field run away up over a swell clear to some woods. It was a big field. The feller — I wish I could think of his 4 name — 't warn't Billington — don't see nobody around. And the machine was workin' on the other side of the swell. So he starts off over there, bath robe and all, right under the hot sun. He got 'bout out into the middle of the field when he begun to think that, p'raps he was a dum fool. He was faint. And they warn't no shade nor nothin'. But a little further on the field had been raked into win'rows. And they was a little shade he could get by lying down. So he lay down right close to the win'row to wait 'til things got quieted down so's they didn't spin no more. Well, sir. That's the last thing he remembers until he woke up in his hospital bed — all covered up with new scrapes and plasters. Seems if he must a-fainted, or gone to sleep or sunthin'.

“Well, there he was a-layin' out in the middle of a hay field under a win'row. Know what a win'row is? Thought you didn't. Well, you see first they rake the field into win'rows, you know — long lines of hay that sometimes looks sunthin' like ocean waves. Then they take the hoss rake — or power rake, if they have one, like these people did and roll up the win'row lengthwise and 'cock it up'. Roll it 'til they got enough for a cock, lift the rake, then scrape up enough for the next cock and so on. Maybe, that's what they was doin', when this feller goes out to the field. Or maybe they had a hay loader. That's a rig they push down a win'row behind a truck. It's geared sunthin' like a lawn mower; when you push it, a row of spikes go under the hay, pick it up and over a pulley where the hay falls off into the truck. 'Course 5 they's row after row of spikes. And the thing is as broad as a truck. Heh! heh! It may have been a tedder that hit the old guy for all I know. That's a kind of kickin' machine made of pitchforks that they toss grass around with to dry it. And what they drive over win'rows if they get wet, so's to spread the hay and dry it thorough. Well, anyway, it don't make no difference what kind of a machine it was, the feller that was runnin' it didn't see old what's his name, laid out under a win'row in a bathrobe. You really wouldn't expect

Library of Congress

to find a feller under a win'row out in the middle of a hayfield on a good hay day, so he run his machine over him and raked him and cocked him, or he loaded him — or tried to — . Though perhaps he give him a good teddin' and picked his bath robe to pieces. Anyway, he noticed sun'thin' was wrong when old what's his name went into the machinery. An', o' course, they warn't no place for him then but the hospital, so they took him back.

“Well, I heard he was able to walk around. Then I heard he was back in bed — wasn't gettin' over his hayin' accident as well as had been expected. I knew about the time he'd got sheared by the mowin' machine. But I hadn't heard about his being tugged. So I went to see him. He was gettin' along all right then. But, a course this last visit to the hay field had set him back some. The nurse told me about it. But Worthington — don't seem as that was his name, either — didn't want to talk about it. He said he'd taken a walk, and he guessed he'd overdid. I says, ‘When you get out, the hayin' season will be over. But don't 6 you go monkeyin' around no corn cutter,’ I says, ‘and get yourself cut up into ensilage,’ I says. But he didn't laugh none. He kinder changed the subject. He said that the nurses had been having fun with him about breakin' the rules and goin' walkin'. That they said it was a wonder that he warn't arrested for goin' out in the street with nothin' on but a bathrobe. They was nuns, you know, the nurses was. He told ‘em, ‘Well,’ he says he said, ‘don't know what anybody would arrest me for, ‘cause I did have on a bathrobe. And, if anyone had stopped and examined me,’ he says, ‘I guess they'd a found out that I had on as much clothes as some women wear around here!,’ he says. And he was prob'ly right about it at that.

“Well, as I was tellin' yer, he died finally, after he'd been back home sometime. But it didn't have nothin' to do with his eatin' maple syrup. Seems to me it was the effects of gettin' the slack of his pants caught in a saw rig. Or, maybe, he never quite recovered from the hayin' operations he underwent. Don't know as the story proves anythin', but it's a good story and I don't know as stories have to prove anything if they're good.”